



Guide to the Knight family papers, 1784-1960 and undated, bulk 1840s-1890s

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David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

411 Chapel Drive

Duke University

Durham 27708

askRL@duke.edu

URL: <https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/>

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Summary

Collection Title:

Knight family papers, 1784-1960 and undated, 1840s-1890s

Creator:

Knight, John, 1806-1864; Knight, Frances Beall; McDannold, Frances Knight, about 1835-

Abstract:

Correspondence, diaries and notebooks, financial papers, legal papers, genealogical documents, printed materials, and other materials pertain to the John Knight family of Natchez, Mississippi and Frederick, Maryland. Materials in the collection date from 1784 to 1960, and the bulk date from the 1840s to the 1890s. The majority of the papers concern the personal, legal, and financial activities of John Knight (1806-1864), merchant, plantation owner, lawyer, and investor; Frances Z.S. (Beall) Knight (1813-1900), his wife; and their daughter Frances (Fanny) Beall Knight McDannold; as well as their children, relatives, friends, and business partners, especially banker Enoch Pratt and William Murdock Beall. Significant topics include: life in Natchez, Mississippi and Frederick, Maryland; their management of plantations and enslaved people; slavery in Mississippi and other Southern states; 19th century economic conditions, especially concerning cotton, banking and bank failures; U.S. politics in the 1850s-1860s; the Civil War, especially in Maryland; cholera and yellow fever outbreaks; 19th century family life; and the Knights' travels to Europe, Russia, and other places from 1850 to 1864. Genealogies chiefly relate to the descendants of Elisha Beall of Maryland, and the McCleery, Pettit, and McLanahan families of Indiana and Maryland. Papers of John Knight's wife, Frances (Beall) Knight, include her diaries, correspondence, and legal papers. There are also diaries kept by Fanny, their daughter, documenting her travels in the 1860s, as well as her school notebooks and correspondence.

Extent:

5.5 Linear Feet (13 boxes)

Language:

Material in English

Collection ID:

RL.11553

Permalink:

<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/m1tp8n>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Knight family papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

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Background

Scope and Content

Collection contains correspondence, diaries and notebooks, financial papers, legal papers, genealogical documents, printed materials, and other items pertaining to the Knight family of Natchez, Mississippi and Frederick, Maryland. Materials in the collection date from 1784 to 1960, with the bulk of the papers dating from the 1840s to the 1890s. The majority concern the personal, legal, and financial activities of John Knight (1806-1864), merchant, plantation owner, lawyer, and investor; Frances Z. S. (Beall) Knight (1813-1900), his wife; and their daughter Frances (Fanny) Beall Knight; as well as relatives, friends, and business partners, especially banker Enoch Pratt and William Beall.

Significant topics include: life in Natchez, Mississippi and Frederick, Maryland; plantations, slaves, and slavery in Mississippi and other Southern states; 19th century economic conditions, especially concerning the cotton market; banking and bank failures; U.S. politics in the 1850s and 1860s; the Civil War, especially in Maryland; reports of cholera and yellow fever outbreaks; 19th century family life; and the Knights' travels to Europe, Egypt, Turkey, and Russia from 1850 to 1864.

Genealogies chiefly relate to the descendants of Elisha Beall of Maryland. There are also two late 19th century albumen photographs of homes in West Virginia (James and Lizzie Brown's "Kingswood") and Maryland ("Beallview," the house of Elisha Beall). A few other images of the Knights are found in the Rubenstein Library's Picture File Collection.

The papers of John Knight concern his business relations with the Beall family of Maryland; his plantations in Mississippi, Hyde Park and Beverly Place, and their management; the purchases, expenses, and medical care of the enslaved people who lived and worked on those plantations; investments in cotton land in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas; economic conditions in the United States, especially concerning the cotton market; the effects of the Civil War, especially in Maryland; and the family's trips to Europe. His notebooks keep careful track of expenses and income, as well as travel. The many land

deeds, indentures, slave lists, bills of purchase, and other financial and legal documents in the collection, some dating to the 1700s, chiefly relate to his activities as an attorney and landholder. Many also relate to the legal and financial activities of the Beall family, particularly to William M. Beall. John Knight was also interested in medicine, so the collection holds memoranda books and other papers with prescriptions, receipts, and instructions for medicines treating ailments of the time.

Papers of his wife, Frances (Beall) Knight, include 21 diaries and some correspondence, as well as financial and legal papers. Her diaries describe in detail life in Natchez, Mississippi, religious life, family members, visits, the weather, and health. Of particular interest are her travel diaries, which document the family's travels to Europe, with side trips to Egypt, Turkey, Russia, and other places. Her later papers deal with her financial activities as a relatively young widow, and her role as guardian of her two grandchildren, Knight and Alexandra McDannold, who lived with her after the early deaths of their parents, Fanny Knight McDannold and Thomas McDannold.

The ten diaries of Frances (Fanny) Beall Knight, the daughter of John and Frances Knight, document in some detail their trips to Europe, and details of her father's death abroad in 1864; the collection also contains some of her school and family notebooks and correspondence. Later papers refer to her husband, Thomas Alexander McDannold, who may have been the author of at least one of the anonymous notebooks in the collection, and their two children, Alexandra and John.

20th century dates in the collection refer to a typed draft of a paper on 19th century packet ships, and an article from a Maryland history magazine.

Biographical/Historical

John M. Knight was born in 1806 in Maryland. He was primarily a merchant and financier, but he also owned lands in Louisiana, Arkansas, and several plantations in Mississippi. His financial investments and legal activities were chiefly handled by his business partners William M. Beall and Enoch Pratt, both of Maryland. He was ill for much of his life, but managed to travel abroad extensively with his family from the 1840s through the 1860s. He died in Biarritz, France, in 1864 and was buried in Maryland.

John Knight's wife, Frances Zeruah Susannah Beall, was his first cousin through the Beall family. She was born in 1813 and died in 1900, outliving her husband by many years, and handling his estate and the guardianship of her two young grandchildren after the early deaths of their parents, Frances (Fanny) Knight and Thomas Alexander McDannold.

Additional information on the Beall and Knight family histories can be found in the Genealogy series in this collection and online.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests in this collection have not been transferred to Duke University. For more information, consult the copyright section of the Regulations and Procedures of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

Acquisition Information

The Knight family papers, formerly the John Knight papers, were received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library as a purchase in 1959-1969.

Processing Information

Processed and encoded by Yuqiao Cao, April 2018. Additional description by Paula Jeannet, April 2018.

Accession(s) described in this finding aid: 59-56, 64-216, and 69-86.

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Names and Subjects

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- Cotton trade -- United States
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- Families -- United States -- 19th century
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- Plantations -- Mississippi
- Slave trade -- Southern States
- Slavery -- Mississippi
- Women -- Diaries
- Women travelers - 19th century -- Diaries
- Europe -- Description and travel -- 19th century
- Frederick (Md.) -- History -- 19th century
- Maryland -- Genealogy
- Maryland -- History -- 19th century
- Maryland -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
- Mississippi -- Economic conditions
- Mississippi -- History -- 19th century
- Natchez (Miss.) -- History -- 19th century
- Russia -- Description and travel -- 19th century
- United States -- Economic conditions -- to 1865
- United States -- Politics and government -- 1845-1861
- Albumen prints
- Black-and-white photographs
- Diaries
- Enslaved persons -- Southern States -- Economic conditions
- Beall, William Murdoch, 1789-1847
- Pratt, Enoch, 1808-1896
- Beall family (Md.)
- Knight family (Md.)

Collection Inventory

Correspondence, 1817-1895 and undated

Physical Description: 1.5 Linear Feet
3 boxes

Scope and Contents

Correspondence consists chiefly of business letters by John Knight and his partners and friends. However, there are also many letters by Knight family

members and their relatives and friends. The correspondence begins in 1817 with letters from Mary (McCleery) Knight in Indiana to her sister Frances (McCleery) Beall, William M. Beall's wife. There is also correspondence between Fanny Knight, John and Frances Knight's daughter, and Thomas McDannold during their courtship. Correspondence also includes letters from friends and relatives while the Knights were traveling abroad. Many letters also mention John Knight's attempts at various cures for ill health, including water cures, hot springs, and baths.

Between 1830 and 1864, Knight's business correspondence with Enoch Pratt, a Baltimore banker in charge of Knight's finances, William Beall, and others, predominates. Topics include: the U.S. political and economic climate: the conflict between Henry Clay and Andrew Jackson; the cotton market; banking and bank failures; investment in cotton land in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas; the purchase and sale of slaves, with some bought by William Beall and sent to Knight in Mississippi; the treatment and medical care of slaves; the operation of Knight's plantations; piracy on the Mississippi River, 1841; cholera and yellow fever epidemics in New York and New Orleans in 1832, 1833, 1837, and 1841; the economic panic of 1857; education at the Frederick Female Academy, Frederick, Maryland; financial conditions in the United States during the Civil War; the relations between the United States and England during the war; and the course of the Civil War, especially the Union invasion of Maryland. One early letter from Roger Brooke Taney to William Murdock Beall explains his refusal of the vice-presidency and discussing his interest in the U.S. presidency.

Other smaller groups of correspondence were written by Frances "Fanny" Knight McDannold, the daughter of John and Frances Knight, her children Knight and Alexandra, and husband Thomas McDannold, and that family's acquaintances.

The correspondence ends with a much smaller series of letters, which include items to Frances S.Z. Knight from her grandchildren, and other correspondence reflecting her financial and legal activities as she managed her husband's large estate and the guardianship of her grandchildren even as she approached old age.

Some additional correspondence can be found in the Legal and Financial Papers series.

1817-1843 (online item available)

Box 1

Physical Description: 7 folders

Digital Object: [1817-1843 \(1 of 5\)](#)

Digital Object: [1817-1843 \(2 of 5\)](#)

Digital Object: [1817-1843 \(3 of 5\)](#)

Digital Object: [1817-1843 \(4 of 5\)](#)

Digital Object: [1817-1843 \(5 of 5\)](#)

Digital Object: [1844-1862 \(1 of 2\)](#)

Digital Object: [1844-1862 \(2 of 2\)](#)

1844-1862 Box 2

Physical Description: 9 folders

1863-1895 and undated Box 3

Physical Description: 8 Files

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Diaries, 1846-1892

Physical Description: 1.5 Linear Feet
3 boxes

Scope and Contents

Series consists of diaries and notebooks, almost all written by Frances Beall Knight (21), with some by John Knight (4), and Fanny Knight (10)). Most are small bound volumes, but a few are larger in size.

The Frances Beall Knight diaries span the years 1845-1865; and an anonymous 1892 diary has also been identified as hers. Other anonymous volumes in the collection have not been identified but may also be hers. The earliest diaries describe in detail of life in Natchez, Mississippi, chiefly commenting on the weather, illnesses, visits, and other aspects of daily routine; there are also many passages concerning religion and religious activities, as well as comments on the Mexican War, guncotton, the use of electricity, and the telegraph. A large group of the volumes relates to several visits made by the Knight family to Europe, chiefly to cities and resorts in France, Switzerland, and Italy, between 1850 and 1864, as well as a visit to Egypt, Turkey, and Russia. In the last volume, from 1892, an elderly Frances Beall Knight describes life with her grandchildren, who were at that time also her wards.

The Frances (Fanny) Beall Knight diaries, written by the young daughter of John and Frances Knight from 1852 to 1864, also describe daily life and travels in Europe, although in less detail; in 1864, Fanny describes the circumstances of her father's death in Biarritz, France.

The notebooks and diaries of John Knight from 1850 to 1856 contain financial notes, hotel lists, and travel expenses.

This series houses six anonymous diaries, dating from 1867 to 1883, which are likely by Knight family members, some possibly by Fannie's husband Thomas A. McDannold (1835-1883).

Frances Beall Knight, 1846-1892 Box 4

Physical Description: 21 items

Fanny Beall Knight, 1852-1864 Box 5

Physical Description: 10 items

John Knight, 1850-1856 Box 5

Physical Description: 4 items

Anonymous diaries, 1867-1883 Box 6

Physical Description: 6 items
1 box

Scope and Contents

These diaries are unsigned. They may written by a member of the Knight family, some possibly by Thomas A. McDannold, Fanny's husband.

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Notebooks, 1831-1884

Physical Description: 0.5 Linear Feet
1 box

Scope and Contents

A variety of small volumes kept by family members make up this series. Frances Beall Knight's 1831-1879 notebooks include a scrapbook with a few entries from her husband and friends, pasted-in clippings with obituaries for Elisha Beall, William M. Beall, and Zeruah Bell, pasted-in engravings, copied poems, and other writings. There is also a notebook with medical and financial content; a notebook with mostly religious content; and a notebook on various subjects.

There is one notebook from 1858 identified as John Knight's, in which he describes the family's trip to Russia. Also in the series are Frances (Fanny) Beall Knight's booklets of schoolwork dated from the 1840s to 1854.

This series also includes four anonymous notebooks. The smallest item, from after 1862, is actually a small folded sheaf of notes on world history, perhaps from a lecture or a book. Another small volume, circa 1864, contains needlework patterns, recipes, and housekeeping notes, and may be Fanny Knight's; a notebook from 1884 listing traveling trunk and bank vault contents,

and medical receipts, which may be Frances B. Knight's while she acted as guardian of her two grandchildren; and another is a baby journal recording in detail the first years of Knight McDannold's life, 1875-1882.

Fanny Beall Knight, 1840-1854 Box 7

Physical Description: 4 items

Frances Beall Knight, 1831-1879 Box 7

Physical Description: 5 items

John Knight, 1858 Box 7

Physical Description: 1 folders

Anonymous, 1862-1884 Box 7

Physical Description: 4 items

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Financial Papers, 1829-1900

Physical Description: 17 folders
3 boxes

Scope and Contents

The earliest financial papers include promissory notes from Natchez, Mississippi, 1829-1842. Other folders contain John Knight's account and bank books from 1856 and 1861; Knight family financial papers, 1870-1897; Frances Knight's guardianship documents for the two McDannold children, 1883-1885, and her dividends notebook, 1887-1891. Various bills and receipts, 1830-1900, generally concern John Knight's business interests, travel expenses, and Knight family living expenses; some pertain to plantation expenses, slaveholding and related activities. Additional financial information, including references to enslaved people, is found attached to documents in the Legal Papers series.

Promissory notes, 1829-1842 Box 8

Physical Description: 1 folders

Scope and Contents

All or almost all of these related to John Knight's business transactions in Natchez, Mississippi.

John Knight account and bank books, 1856-1861 Box 8

Physical Description: 2 items

Knight family financial papers, 1870-1897	Box 8
Physical Description: 16 items	
Frances Beall Knight guardianship documents, 1883-1885	Box 8
Physical Description: 16 items	
Frances Beall Knight dividends notebook, 1887-1891	Box 8
Physical Description: 1 items	
Bills and receipts, 1830-1884	Box 10
Physical Description: 9 folders 1 box	
Bills and receipts, 1885-1900	Box 11
Physical Description: 3 folders	

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Legal Papers, 1784-1894 and undated

Physical Description: 9 folders

Scope and Contents

Legal papers include lists of enslaved people of Hyde Park and Beverly Place plantations, and related documentation of purchases and expenses; travel documents and passports; the wills of John, Frances, and Fanny Knight and William M. Beall; land deeds, indentures and partnership papers, 1784-1859, including many related to the Beall family and business partners; and a certificate document from the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Various early legal papers, 1784-1840	Box 8
Physical Description: 16 items	
Will of William M. Beall, 1839	Box 8
Physical Description: 1 items	
Lists of enslaved people and related expenses, 1842-1856	Box 8
Physical Description: 11 items	

Travel documents of John Knight and Frances Beall Knight, 1837-1864	Box 8
Physical Description: 6 items	
Scope and Contents	
These include official travel documents similar to passports.	
<hr/>	
Wills of John, Frances, and Fanny Knight, 1850-1894 and undated	Box 8
Physical Description: 11 items	
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Various legal papers, 1842-1845	Box 8
Physical Description: 15 items	
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Various legal papers, 1849-1853	Box 8
Physical Description: 10 items	
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Various legal papers, 1854-1859 and undated	Box 8
Physical Description: 19 items	
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Oversize legal papers, 1837-1898	Box 9
Physical Description: 4 folders 1 box	

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Genealogy, after 1957 and undated

Physical Description: 3 items
1 folder

Scope and Contents

Genealogical files contain a hand-drawn family tree for Henry McCleery and Martha Ritchie, whose children married into the Beall and Knight families; it includes geographical data, and the names of John Knight and Frances Beall, first cousins.

Other items consist of a typewritten document that gives the history of the McCleery, Ritchie, Pettit, and McLanahan families of Maryland to the tenth generation, and a typewritten document that outlines descendants of James Beall Sr., Maryland, to the eleventh generation.

Genealogical documents	Box 11
Physical Description: 3 items	

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Other Papers, 1834-circa 1959 and undated

Physical Description: 6 folders
2 boxes

Scope and Contents

Content varies considerably: manuscript medical prescriptions for John and Frances Knight, 1861-1869; 19th century visiting cards; and written pieces dated 1844-1864 which include articles, cards, and a hand-drawn floor plan.

Printed materials dating about 1850-1862 include booklets and flyers from England; clippings on finance; an 1852 map of England and Ireland railroads; a copy of John Knight's 1861 paper (editorial article, or speech?) on the cotton question; a list of articles on John Knight's Hyde Park Plantation; a Walsh's railroad guide, with a map of Ireland, and newspapers and magazine pages about Abraham Lincoln's assassination.

Series also includes two articles written by Alexandra Lee Levin, Fanny Knight's granddaughter, on topics related to the Knight family: a typewritten draft entitled "The five leading mail packet lines of the Trans-Atlantic Service (1848-1864)" with illustrations of ships pasted in, and an article on John Knight's Baltimore banker and business partner: "Enoch Pratt as patron of Edward S. Bartholomew, sculptor," published in Maryland Historical Magazine, December 1956.

Prescriptions, 1861-1869 and undated Box 11

Physical Description: 1 folders

Scope and Contents

Various medical prescriptions for members of the Knight family by doctors and pharmacists in Paris, Biarritz, Naples, Liverpool, and Naples.

Printed materials, 1850-1862 and undated Box 11

Physical Description: 1 folders

Oversize printed materials, 1834-1958 Box 12

Physical Description: 10 items

Visiting cards, 19th century Box 11

Physical Description: 3 items

Mixed papers, 1844-1864 and undated Box 11

Physical Description: 1 folders

"The five leading mail packet lines of the Trans-Atlantic Service (1848-1864)," typewritten draft with illustrations, Alexandra Lee Levin, circa 1959 Box 11

Physical Description: 23 pages

"Enoch Pratt as patron of Edward S. Bartholomew, sculptor," in Maryland Historical Magazine, 1956 December Box 11

Physical Description: 1 items

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Photographs, late 19th century

Physical Description: 2 items

1 box

Scope and Contents

Two albumen photographs on large card mounts, showing views of two ancestral homes. Also found in the Rubenstein Library's Picture Collection, probably separated from the Knight collection: a copy of a miniature of John Knight painted by Hugh Bridgeport in 1832; a photograph of Frances Z.S. Beall Knight; and photographs of Knight and of his tombstone in Mount Olivet Cemetery, Frederick, Maryland.

James A. Brown and Lizzie A. Brown's home, "Kingswood," Preston County, West Virginia, albumen photograph mounted on card, late 19th century Box 13

Physical Description: 1 items

Elisha Beall's home, "Beallview," Frederick, Maryland, hand-tinted albumen photograph mounted on card, late 19th century Box 13

Physical Description: 1 items

Scope and Contents

Written on back: "Chief Justice Roger B. Taney slept here overnight with Francis Scott Key."

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